

cm mini reviews

A rapid-fire round-up of sample libraries, ROMplers and more

Toontrack

Electronic EZX £55

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200

Web www.timespace.com

Format EZX for EZdrummer/Superior Drummer 2.0

Toontrack's EZX add-ons have focused thus far on acoustic drum kits suitable for specific genres, including funk, jazz, rock and metal. Electronic EZX, however, goes off in a completely different direction, presenting a wide range of electronic drum sounds from an impressive list of sources, including various modified and circuit-bent drum machines and synths - see the Toontrack website for the full list.

The brains behind Electronic EZX is electronica legend Richard Devine, and the quality of the sounds on offer does him proud. 33 kits worth of hits are rammed into the 1.2GB soundbank, along with a ton of alternative kicks and snares, plus the built-in mixer features six parallel effects processing channels, for the easy application of tube distortion, delay, chorus and more. There's also a set of MIDI grooves and fills included, each made with a specific kit in mind.

On the downside, the interface puts artistic license ahead of practicality, with no indication as to... well, anything, really. It's just a funky-looking set of buttons with no visual indication of what sort of sound each might trigger. And as with all EZXs, there's no real control given over the individual sounds, which feels like a bit more of an issue here than with



its acoustic siblings - although the sheer quality of said sounds and the fact that they can be processed with the effects channels makes up for it. Ultimately, Electronic EZX is an impressively comprehensive and characterful percussive tool for producers of all styles of electronic and dance music.

8/10

Best Service £399

Chris Hein Horns Vol 3

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200

Web www.timespace.com

Format Kontakt Player

This title builds on the 'solo' and 'sections' coverage of the first two volumes, this time focusing solely on muted brass. The package uses around 20,000 individual samples, amounting to 14GB of data. Instruments included are trumpet (with Harmon, straight and cup mutes), and tenor and bass trombone (with Harmon, straight and bucket mutes), arranged as 12 solo and 16 ensemble instruments. The Kontakt interface runs to 11 pages and has EQ, delay, convolution reverb, chorus and more. But the real strong point is the playability. Firstly, there are a whopping 18 keyswitch articulations, ranging from falls and stabs to glides, runs and flutters. These are complemented by performance functions, including six legato modes, crescendo speed and five 'hot keys' (MIDI notes) that, when struck, repeat the last-played note but with a different articulation. Initially, it can all be a bit daunting, but if you're aiming for realistic muted brass, you'll be truly impressed by what this set has to offer.

9/10



ASK Video

Record Tutorial DVD £36

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200

Web www.timespace.com

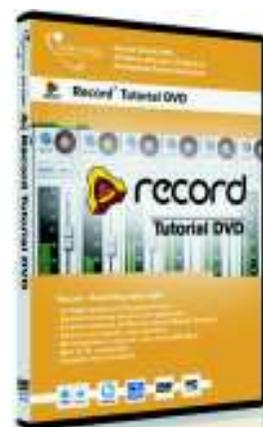
Format DVD-ROM, PC/Mac

This tutorial DVD-ROM aims to make learning Propellerhead's Record as painless as possible. With 45 videos (over 3.5 hours of material), ASK have broken everything down into bite-size segments. Starting with an explanation of the features Record shares with its 'sister' app Reason (and the benefits of owning both), it takes you logically through preferences and general screen navigation. Then it moves onto specific tasks relating to audio, MIDI, arranging, effects, mixing and advanced aspects such as the ReGroove Mixer.

We found the on-screen DVD-ROM system simple to use, but only came across the 17 example Record sessions while browsing the main DVD. These match the sessions in the videos, so if you already own Record, you can follow along (but note that some of them require Reason to work fully).

As good as this DVD is, remember that if you own Record, you already have access to numerous Propellerhead online tutorial videos, and these to some extent cover similar ground.

8/10



Vir2 World Impact: Global Percussion £259

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200
Web www.timespace.com
Format Kontakt Player

World Impact: Global Percussion includes instruments from Africa, the Middle East, Asia, North America, South America and Europe. Sounds range from African and Middle Eastern Udu to Peruvian Cajon and the Balinese Nipple Gong, as well as hand-held percussion. The largest single component is a set of Japanese Taiko drums. There are multiple velocity layers and alternate round robin hits, and the whole library weighs in at a hefty 13GB.

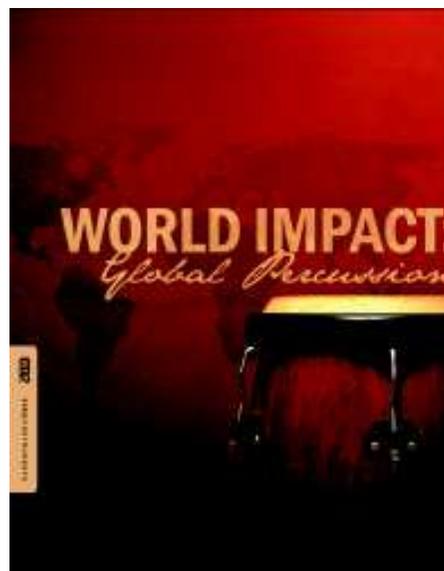
Use of the Kontakt Player front-end has enabled Vir2 to tailor the interface to the task and include additional features such as humanise (timing, pitch and volume), equaliser, EZRoom convolution reverb (with over 50 rooms on offer) and a script-based playback mode called 'triggers'. This includes typical percussion techniques, such as choke, roll and flam, and offers an artificial (but more flexible) alternative to the many performed articulations

that are also included in the sample set.

The library's instruments are arranged both by region and type, and in addition to the main instruments, there's a bonus folder of more creative 'sound design' patches. One further neat library feature is the 'preview instruments' for quick auditioning of a whole region or instrument type.

As you might expect, the majority of the 300 or so instruments come from South America, Asia and Africa. The overall quality is excellent, and the patches are complemented well by the aforementioned convolution reverb and humanise options. We were also impressed by their use in the sound design patches, although it would have been good to see some more of these. However, it's the triggers feature that really caught our imagination, as in addition to the obvious articulations, you also get 25 user patterns - eight of these have already been programmed, but you can edit them yourself or simply start from scratch, enabling you to quickly create 16-step patterns.

8/10



Focusrite Saffire 6 USB £140

Contact sales@focusrite.com
Web www.focusrite.com
Format PC/Mac, USB1.1

This the most affordable Saffire interface yet, and also the first to use USB instead of FireWire. On an entirely superficial note, the fascia sports yellow, er, 'knob rings', as opposed to the blue of the rest of the family, but the build quality is just as good as the pricier Saffire units, with a robust metal case and solid controls. A decent software bundle serves to further sweeten the deal.

Down to business, then, and what we have here is a 2-in/4-out audio interface with MIDI In/Out on 5-pin DIN sockets. The device is entirely bus-powered and can run at up to 48kHz/24-bit.

The two inputs are mic/line/instrument combo sockets, able to take 1/4" jack or XLR. There's switchable phantom power, but you can't have it on one input only - it's all or nothing. Per-channel controls are a gain knob, Inst button to engage Hi-Z instrument mode, and a 10dB pad switch. A green lamp indicates signal present, while a red one flags up clipping.

As for outputs, round the back you'll find a pair of 1/4" balanced jacks and two pairs of RCA outs. The jacks and first set of RCAs both give



outs 1/2, while outs 3/4 appear on the remaining RCA pair. You can control the level of output 1/2 with the Monitor knob on the front; output 3/4 always comes out at full level.

There's direct monitoring of input signals, and you set the balance between this and your DAW playback using the Mixer knob. Normally, the two inputs are panned hard left and right (ie, for stereo sources), but there's a handy button that sums the inputs to mono.

The headphones out has its own level knob and a switch to monitor outs 1/2 or 3/4 - this is handy for cueing up when DJing, and the RCA outputs further make this a solid choice for DJs.

The Saffire 6 USB is very straightforward to use and is sonically impressive. The preamps are clean and clear, with a low noise floor - they

perform admirably with both dynamic and condenser mics. We found the quality of the output to be virtually identical to that of the upmarket Saffire Pro 40, the only marked difference being that the headphone output didn't go quite as ear-bleedingly loud.

To conclude, this is an attractive, affordable box that's a well thought-out slice of the pricier Saffires, and not just a cheap cash-in on their good name. Whether you're into making quality home productions, mobile recording or DJing, this one comes recommended.

9/10

Puremagnetik **DOWNLOAD**
Upright \$12

Contact info@puremagnetik.com
Web www.puremagnetik.com
Format Live Pack, Kontakt 3.5, EXS24

The latest Micropak from the Puremagnetik camp sees them issue their first acoustic bass. It comprises 40 loops (Apple Loops and Live Clips) and eight sampler instruments (Live, Kontakt and EXS24), all sourced from a single acoustic bass sample set. Playing styles are bowed and plucked with additional sampler instruments delivering more synth-inspired processed sounds. The loops make good use of all instruments to deliver a wide variety of styles from jazz to dance, but the playable sample sets are limited by their four velocity layers. On the upside, Kontakt and Live users get an additional multi-miked acoustic patch with three positions: direct, close and room.

7/10



Big Fish Audio
Off The Hook Guitars £72

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200
Web www.timespace.com
Format WAV, Acid WAV, REX, Apple Loops, Stylus RMX

The Off The Hook series continues, this time with almost 2.5GB of urban-inspired guitar loops. Arranged across 40 construction kits, tempos range from 57 to 135bpm, and guitars include clean picked acoustic and electric, as well as some overdriven sounds. Each kit also contains a stereo drum mix (useful in itself) and you'll find additional folders of guitar effects, such as slides, wahs and licks, with which to augment your tracks. Musically, the set is unquestionably soul-influenced, and very crisp in its sound. Like many construction kits, the loops can act as inspiration for a new track or slot in as underscore. But for us, the extra folder of effects is the clincher.

8/10

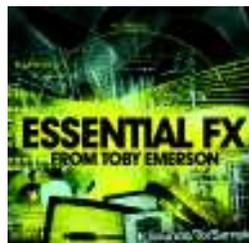


Sounds to Sample **DOWNLOAD**
Essential FX Vol 1 £20

Contact via website
Web www.soundstosample.com
Format WAV

Anyone producing club music will know how important effects are for spicing up your tracks, and this is very much what Essential FX Volume 1 is all about. Delivering roughly 650MB of WAV-format FX, you've got seven folders of sounds ranging from risers, falls and lasers to atmospheres, explosions and electro effects. Overall, the sounds are extremely good, and although you may wonder why you'd need, say, 120 different rising effects, when you're trying to find just the right sound, subtle variation is key. If we have one gripe, it's that the sounds aren't pre-mapped for regular sampler instruments, but given the bargain price, that's no big deal.

8/10



Zero-G
Electro House £60

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200
Web www.timespace.com
Format WAV, Acid WAV, REX2, NN-XT, Kontakt, EXS24, Apple Loops, Stylus RMX, AIFF

An all-in-one kit here, with hits, loops and multis. The well programmed drum loops sound great but the basses are bit limited; Zero-G have gnarly, throaty bass sounds nailed (these are especially awesome through a low-pass filter) but we'd like to see more taut, resonant tones. The loops work well together, though, and creating quirky, slanted house grooves is a breeze. Single hits are punchy (the kicks and hats impress in particular), although, oddly, a few samples are slightly off-centre, so you might want to adjust their panning to compensate. Most of the synth multis sound flat and feel half-baked. Only consider this for the drum loops and hits, then.

7/10



Sample Magic
Tribal Tech-House £60

Contact Time+Space, 01837 55200
Web www.timespace.com
Format WAV, Stylus RMX-compatible, REX, EXS24, NN-XT, Kontakt 2, Apple Loops, HALion

A huge sample library, packed with 2.29GB of loops and single drum hits. The loops, at 125, 127 and 130bpm, are some of the best we've heard for tribal house, and the grooves have an authentic bounce to them. You get looped basslines, beats, 'combi loops' (complete mixed grooves with variations, eg, some more stripped down), FX, percussion, synths and 'tops' (electronic percussive grooves). The sound quality is up to the usual impeccable Sample Magic standards: loops are superbly mixed and the audio fidelity is top notch. The only issue we spotted is that a few of the kick drum files actually contain the same sounds, which is a little careless.

9/10



Loopmasters
Fidget House Vol 2 £20

Contact info@loopmasters.com
Web www.loopmasters.com
Format WAV, Acid WAV, REX2, Apple Loops, HALion, Kontakt, EXS24, SFZ

Loopmasters have really hit the mark with this unique, authentic and utterly cool release. Fidget House 2 boasts a wide range of sounds, from drum loops (each with a neat twist, be it a granular effect, some otherworldly percussion instrument or just well-timed reversing) to 'broken band' samples (featuring some wicked spatial/out-of-phase effects). True to the genre demarcation, almost every loop has a degree of movement and scattiness to it and there's some really clever, ear-catching sound design happening. Oh, and the multis exude quality, too. There are some very original sounds here and the audio quality is great.

10/10



Loopmasters **DOWNLOAD**
Meat Katie – Tech Funk Producer £25

Contact info@loopmasters.com
 Web www.loopmasters.com
 Format WAV, Acid WAV, REX2, Reason ReFill, Live Pack, Apple Loops, HALion, Kontakt, EXS24, SFZ, NN-XT



There's a pro producer onboard, but nothing too inspiring in this pack: most samples are lacklustre and unoriginal both in sound and groove. There are drum, synth, bass and FX loops, plus single drum hits, with the loops in vague construction kit format – some are silent, save for an occasional hit! However, some loops contain unexpected elements (eg, 'kick' loops with claps, hi-hats, and snares), so layering them can be unpredictable. There are some neat stabs and vocal samples to be found, but overall, this one is lacking.

6/10

Producer Loops **DOWNLOAD**
Liquid Drum and Bass £20

Contact via website
 Web www.producerloops.com
 Format WAV, Acid WAV, REX2, Reason ReFill



A construction kit collection of ambient/chillout DnB loops. The five supplied kits offer some expansive soundscape pads, and musically it all fits the genre. Unfortunately, Liquid DnB is let down by the mix. The drums aren't punchy enough and don't hit the right frequencies to cut through the dense ambient sounds – the result is a distant, faraway vibe. The kicks in particular need greater attack and brevity. The bass is also disappointing – the hollow sounds on offer often clash with the kick. While this pack isn't a disaster, a drum 'n' bass sample library that has poor drums and bass doesn't make the best impression, and the sounds in general could do with better EQing and high-passing to slot them into the mix better.

5/10

Resonant Vibes **DOWNLOAD**
Thomas Penton's Complete Essential Series £60

Contact via website
 Web www.soundstosample.com
 Format WAV



Three of Thomas Penton's house sample packs are collated here into one vast set: Drums & Percussion, Loops & Effects and his 2008 Update. This amounts to a great collection of house drum hits (there are 329 claps alone!) plus many construction kit-style loops. The loops are high-quality, meat-and-potatoes house grooves that serve as excellent track foundations. The hits are great, too, being clear, to the point and sonically top-drawer. Overall, an excellent library that's as good for newcomers as it is for those who've somehow exhausted the possibilities of their Vengeance and Sounds of Revolution packs.

8/10

Rob Papen

SubBoomBass

"...I've loved SubBoomBass from the start! A must have..."
 - JUNKIE XL, Musician, Producer, Remixer

"...essential for anyone making Dance music..."
 - FUTURE MUSIC



Ultra deep synth bass virtual instrument with huge cone-rattling sounds to devastate any track!



"Predator...is great, it's one of my favourite synths."
 - SANDER VAN DOORN
 Producer, Remixer, DJ

"Blue was the first one I bought and I find it so rich and warm."
 - BUSHWACKA!
 Producer, Remixer, DJ

"...the amount of variety in the presets alone is staggering."
 - SHAWN PATTERSON
 Film and tv composer

"WOW" from the man who was voted best DJ in the world for the 3rd time in 2009.
 - ARMIN VAN BUUREN

9/10



www.timespace.com/rob_papen